

UNCLASSIFIED

*NSADaily*

(U) History Today - 21 March 2011

Run Date: 03/21/2011

(U) Deception has been an integral part of warfare since our ancestors began throwing rocks at one another. As warfare, and the technologies that supported it, evolved, the application of deceptive practices became all the more sophisticated. One innovative example of this occurred in the Balkans during World War II.

(U) By the spring of 1939, the Italian empire included a considerable number of colonies in Africa and Asia, not to mention acquisitions closer to home in the Mediterranean. Italy's Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, wishing both to further his currency with his Axis partners and to sate his imperial ambitions, took the bold move of invading neighboring Albania on April 7. Within a matter of days the kingdom of Albania was reduced to an Italian fiefdom.

(U) This unprovoked annexation did not go unnoticed by the other European powers. The Yugoslavs, in particular, were anxious about the healthy appetite of their Axis neighbors, and it did not require a seer to envision that their country might be next.

(U) In September, World War came to Europe, and for the next eighteen months the Yugoslavs witnessed the Axis Powers voraciously consume one nation after the next. By then, it had become all too apparent to planners in Belgrade that a symmetrical military response to Germany or Italy would be unsustainable. Instead, the Yugoslavs began to consider the possibility of a protracted guerilla war against the soon-to-be invaders.

(U) One daunting facet of this strategy was how to arm large numbers of partisans. Virtually surrounded by Axis armies already, the Yugoslavs had few options for acquiring weapons. Still, it was known that the Italians who were grappling to subdue Greece had left their "Churchillian 'naked rear'" of occupied Albania fully exposed. The Yugoslavs reasoned that they could exploit this vulnerability to capture from the Italians sufficient arms and materiel to equip an effective resistance movement.

(U) Hours before the Yugoslavs could implement their preemptive blow in Albania, however, Germany struck their homeland first. The Yugoslavian government, recognizing that the war would shortly be lost, found it all the more imperative to arm themselves for a low intensity, guerilla campaign. To this end, they immediately set about attacking the Italians in Albania. In this offensive, the Yugoslavs were more successful than they had hoped and began to make significant advances against the Italians.

(U) Unbeknownst to the Yugoslavs, the Italians possessed a highly capable cryptologic organization, Sezione 5 of the Servizio Informazioni Militare, which had already broken the Yugoslav's cipher system. Armed with this knowledge, the Italians used their enemy's own cryptography, military message formats, transmission times, and radio frequencies to order Yugoslavia's generals in the field to halt their advance and to withdraw as quickly as possible. The resulting confusion among the Yugoslavs was complete. By the time their senior commanders made sense of what had happened, they also fully understood that they could not use their compromised cryptographic system to issue new instructions via radio or telegraph. Messengers from Belgrade with fresh orders arrived at the front too late to be of value. By that

UNCLASSIFIED

Approved for Release by NSA on 04-15-2011,
EOIA Case # 64316

UNCLASSIFIED

time, the Italians had already engaged in a counteroffensive and were repulsing the Yugoslavian attack.

(U) Thus, in the course of two days, the Italian radio intelligence personnel at Sezione 5 had helped to transform an Italian humiliation into an Italian triumph. Their contribution greatly shortened Italy's campaign in Yugoslavia and saved its strutting dictator some embarrassment among his Axis partners.

(U) Like to blog? Want to discuss historical topics with interested -- and interesting -- folks? Visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, "[History Rocks](#)." (go history rocks).

(U) [Larger view of photo](#)

(U) Have a question or comment on "History Today"? Contact us at DL cch or cch@nsa.

UNCLASSIFIED